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#BC-AFRICA#
#(EXCLUSIVE 10P.M., EST EMBARGO)#
#BY RICHARD BURT#
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WASHINGTON - THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS THREATENED TO WITHHOLD FUTURE SUPPLIES OF URANIUM FUEL TO SOUTH AFRICA UNLESS IT AGREES TO STRICTER INTERNATIONAL CONTROLS TO PREVENT ITS ATOMIC ENERGY PROGRAM FROM BEING USED TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS, OFFICIALS SAID MONDAY.

THE THREAT IS A KEY PART OF A NEW APPROACH BEING UNDERTAKEN BY THE ADMINISTRATION IN SECRET TALKS ON NUCLEAR POLICY WITH THE PRETORIA GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS, THE ADMINISTRATION IS HOLDING OUT THE PROMISE OF FUTURE SUPPLIES OF URANIUM FUEL FOR TWO NEW POWER REACTORS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN RETURN FOR A COMMITMENT BY PRETORIA TO SIGN THE 1968 NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY AND TO DISMANTLE WHAT IS BELIEVED TO BE A NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING FACILITY IN THE KALIHARI.

AT THE SAME TIME, OFFICIALS SAID, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT UNLESS A DEAL OF THIS SORT CAN BE ARRANGED IN THE NEAR FUTURE, IT WILL BE FORCED TO CURTAIL ITS 20-YEAR PROGRAM OF NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH SOUTH AFRICA.

SOUTH AFRICA IS JUDGED BY MOST EXPERTS TO POSSESS BOTH THE TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS AND MATERIALS TO FASHION NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THE POSSIBILITY THAT INCREASING RACIAL STRIFE IN THE REGION MIGHT LEAD PRETORIA TO EXERCISE THIS OPTION HAS THUS LED THE ADMINISTRATION TO PLACE A HIGH PRIORITY ON PREVENTING THIS FROM OCCURRING.

LIKE SEVERAL OTHER POTENTIAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS POWERS, SOUTH AFRICA HAS REFUSED TO SIGN THE NONPROLIFERATION TREATY, WHICH COMMITS NON-WEAPON NATIONS TO FOREGO NUCLEAR ARMS AND PROVIDES FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF INSPECTION FOR NUCLEAR FACILITIES.

THE STRATEGY OF USING THE THREAT OF A CUT-OFF OF AMERICAN FUEL SUPPLIES AS A LEVER TO GET SOUTH AFRICA TO ACCEPT A STRICT PROGRAM OF INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT SHIFT FROM EARLIER ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR INTENTIONS. SEVERAL ADMINISTRATIONS IN THE PAST HAVE PRESSED PRETORIA TO ENTER THE NONPROLIFERATION TREATY, BUT THEY STOPPED SHORT OF THREATENING A NUCLEAR FUEL BAN FOR FEAR THAT WOULD ONLY SERVE TO DRIVE SOUTH AFRICA INTO GREATER NUCLEAR SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

HOWEVER, IN THE OPINION OF SEVERAL OFFICIALS, SOUTH AFRICA IS CLOSE TO ACHIEVING A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY AND STRONGER MEASURES TO DETER THIS ARE NOW IN ORDER. OFFICIALS NOTE, FOR INSTANCE, THAT THE FACILITIES IN THE KALIHARI, WHICH WERE FIRST DETECTED IN AUGUST BY THE SOVIET UNION, HAVE NOT BEEN DISMANTLED. IN ADDITION, WORK IS SAID TO BE PROCEEDING ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANT WHICH WOULD ALLOW SOUTH AFRICA TO PRODUCE WEAPONS-GRADE URANIUM THAT COULD BE USED TO FABRICATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

AS A RESULT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS CONCLUDED THAT AN EXCEPTION SHOULD BE MADE TO ITS GENERAL POLICY OF NOT THREATENING NUCLEAR EMBARGOES IN ORDER TO STEM THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES.

''WE ARE AT THE POINT WHERE WE HAVE TO FISH OR CUT BAIT WITH PRETORIA,'' AN OFFICIAL SAID. ''EITHER THEY AGREE TO A COMPLETE SET OF INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS OR WE WILL HAVE TO END THE NUCLEAR COOPERATION PROGRAM.''

ANOTHER FACTOR BEHIND THE ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION, OFFICIALS SAID, IS THE GROWING SENTIMENT IN CONGRESS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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